

# A tasty bite of El Reno history

## *Burger Day celebrates its 31st year*

By Traci Chapman

To say El Reno Main Street officials and its scores of volunteers are counting down to this year's El Reno Burger Day Festival would be an understatement – director Shana Ford has a countdown clock on the event's website for a reason.

“It's funny – people really pay attention to that, they share it on social media,” Ford said. “We have a lot of really great events in El Reno, but this one is as big as its subject matter.”

That subject matter isn't just burgers, it's the burger, a massive 850-pound onion fried creation cooked by El Reno firefighters, with the assistance of local dignitaries. During this, the 31st year of the iconic event, that tradition will continue, along with an array of activities, attractions, a fun run, car show, music and more, spread over a two-day period May 3-4, Ford said.

Burger Day, for many years a single day, Saturday event, for the second year begins at 5 p.m. Friday. Fully filled with music, acts are set to take three different stages beginning at 5 p.m., and closing out at 10 p.m.

The main event starts early May 4, with car show registration starting at 7:30 a.m. For those who would like to temper their burger eating with healthy activities – and raise funds for Wesley United Methodist Church's mission work in the process – the 2019 Bun Run begins at 8:30 a.m. one mile fun run and walk, followed at 9 a.m. by a 5K.

For those who want to enjoy some music and entertainment with their burgers, gates open and music begins with El Reno High School jazz band at 10 a.m., with acts continuing

throughout the day on both the main and children's stages, Ford said.

But, far and away, burgers – and El Reno's fried onion history – are what's on the menu during Main Street's premier event. Those burgers were made famous in the county seat with iconic restaurants like Johnnie's



and Sid's grills and Robert's Diner. But, the story actually precedes them, going back to Ross Davis and his Hamburger Inn, located on historic Route 66, which runs through El Reno's downtown area.

According to El Reno Main Street records, Davis began serving up his creation in the 1920s, during the Great Depression. At that time, meat was a premium, so Davis “filled in” his hamburgers with half a shredded onion, smashing together the meat and onion to make the burger look bigger – and, in the process, giving it a unique flavor.

More than 60 years later, El Reno Main Street was born. Part of a statewide network designed to revitalize downtown areas, El Reno's organization was formed in 1988. That same year, El Reno Main Street celebrated its own unique creation – El Reno Fried Onion Burger Day.

“The burger so far is the most

interesting part of the preparations – you would think that how hard is it to cook an 850lb fried onion burger, and the answer is, very,” Ford said. “I love the history I am learning of how the burger has been prepared over the years.”

Since its early days in 1988, Burger Day has revolved around the city's iconic creation, including the annual tradition of grilling the biggest onion fried burger in the world. Historically done by El Reno firefighters, who are then joined by city, county and other officials to complete the “Big Burger,” that activity alone draws hundreds – and even thousands – to the city each year.

More information about El Reno Burger Day Festival can be found on the event website, located at <https://elrenoburgerday.com/>.



The crowd gets a taste of the Big Burger. PHOTO BY TRACI CHAPMAN

### *Save the date*

**Friday, May 3**

5 to 10 p.m.

**Saturday, May 4**

7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.



El Reno Fire Chief Kent Lagaly checking the Big Burger during El Reno Burger Day. PHOTO BY TRACI CHAPMAN